

Message Text

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PAGE 01 MEXICO 07737 300142Z

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TAGS: PFOR, MX, CU

SUBJECT: PRESIDENT ECHEVERRIA'S OBSERVATIONS ON HIS VISIT TO CUBA

1. DURING MY CALL ON HIM LAST NIGHT, THE PRESIDENT COVERED THE HIGH SPOTS OF HIS TRIP BUT CONCENTRATED ON THE MIDDLE EAST AND CUBA. AS REGARDS THE LATTER, HE MADE THE FOLLOWING POINTS:

2. RECEPTION ACCORDED MEXICAN PARTY WAS ONE OF MOST ENTHUSIASTIC ON THE ENTIRE TRIP (WHILE ECHEVERRIA AS SECRETARY OF INTERIOR WAS PERSONALLY RESPONSIBLE FOR ORGANIZING "ENTHUSIASTIC RECEPTION GROUPS", HE SEEMED TO TAKE THE ENTHUSIASM OF THE CUBAN CROWDS WITHOUT ANY GRAINS OF SALT).

3. CASTRO, WHOM HE HAD NEVER MET PERSONALLY BEFORE, PROVED GENIAL HOST AND SPENT MANY, MANY HOURS IN HIS COMPANY, SOME OF THEM ALONE. HE FOUND HIM TO BE A MAN OF GREAT VIVACITY, DYNAMISM AND PERSONAL CHARM. HE NOTICED THAT HE HAD A SHARP TROPICAL TEMPER AND SOMETIMES HIS INITIAL REACTION TO A PROBING QUESTION EITHER BY THE VISITING MEXICAN PARTY OR BY THE PRESS MIGHT SOMEWHAT BE ANGRY, BUT HE SEEMED TO LABOR TO BRING HIMSELF BACK UNDER CONTROL. ECHEVERRIA SAID THIS WAS USEFUL OBSERVATION WHICH MIGHT STAND US IN GOOD STED WHEN WE COMMENCED NEGOTIATING WITH FIDEL AS IN HIS VIEW GENTLE PERSISTENCE DEPSITE AN INITIAL EMO-
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PAGE 02 MEXICO 07737 300142Z

TIONAL REPLY MIGHT WELL BRING ABOUT AMORE REASONED SEDONDARY

RESPONSE.

4. IN REPLY TO HIS QUESTIONS, CASTRO SAID THAT HE DID INDEED WANT TO NEGOTIATE WITH THE US AND TO REACH SOME NEW FORM OF RELATIONSHIP. WHEN ASKED ABOUT REIMBURSING US FOR EXPROPRIATIONS, CASTRO SAID THAT IN THAT CASE HE HIMSELF HAD AN EVEN LARGER BILL FOR DAMAGES DONE BY "BLOCKADE". ECHEVERRIA CONSIDERED THIS REMARK IN ITSELF AN INDICATION OF A WILLINGNESS TO BEGIN A BARGAINING PROCESS. HE SAID HE TOLD CASTRO TO RESIGN HIMSELF TO PAYING SOME COMPENSATION (EVEN ALLENDE DID THAT) AS THIS WOULD BE CHEAP PRICE FOR RENEWAL OF RELATIONS WITH US. HE OBSERVED THAT WE IN TURN MIGHT FIND IT POSSIBLE TO OFFER SOME OFFSETTING PAYMENTS TO CASTRO UNDER ONE GUISE OR ANOTHER AND THUS BOTH SIDES WOULD SAVE FACE AND KEEP THEIR PRINCIPLES INTACT. ECHEVERRIA SAID THAT RESTON (WHOSE VISIT HE WAS PROUD TO HAVE PROMOTED) COULD PROBABLY GIVE MORE AMPLE VIEW ON CASTRO'S WILLINGNESS TO NEGOTIATE.

5. THE CUBAN DEBT TO THE SOVIETS IS ENORMOUS AND STILL GROWING THUS LIMITING LEVERAGE TO BE EXERCISED THROUGH SUGAR SALES AND THERE IS A VERY STRONG DEPENDENCY ON USSR IN ALL RESPECTS. FOR THIS REASONS HE WISHED ONCE AGAIN TO PRESS US TO REESTABLISH RELATIONS WITH CUBA THROUGH NEGOTIATIONS. IT WAS KEY IMPORTANCE TO THE HEMISPHERE TO COMMENCE SLOWLY DRAWING CUBA OUT OF THE SOVIET ORBIT AND US PRESENCE WAS VITAL IN ORDER TO DILUTE THE SOVIET INFLUENCE. WE COULD NOT EXPECT CUBA TO RENOUNCE ITS FRIENDSHIP AND DEPENDENCY TO THE USSR FORTHWITH; THIS MUST NECESSARILY BE A SLOW AND PARTIAL PROCESS BUT THE PROCESS MUST NEVERTHELESS BE COMMENCED. IN THIS CONNECTION, HE COULD AFFIRM THAT THERE HAD BEEN NON CUBAN INTERVENTION IN MEXICAN INTERNAL AFFAIRS DURING RECENT YEARS.

6. WHEN I ASKED ABOUT THE STATUS OF PRESIDENT DORTICOS AND HIS WIFE, ECHEVERRIA SAID HE SAW THEM AS RESPECTED BUT VERY RESPECTFUL SECONDARY FIGURES. IN HIS OPINION, IT IS ONLY CASTRO WHO COUNTS BUT HE DID FIND A MELLOWER AND MORE REASONABLE CASTRO THAN HE HAD BEEN LED TO EXPECT.

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PAGE 03 MEXICO 07737 300142Z

7. I FOUND ECHEVERRIA CONSIDERABLY LESS ENTHUSIASTIC ABOUT THE CUBAN DOMESTIC REALITIES THEN I HAD EXPECTED. HE WAS STRUCK BY THE FACT THAT THERE ARE NO RETAIL STORES AND THAT THERE WAS SUCH VERY STRICT RATIONING OF BOTH FOOD AND CLOTHING. WHAT THE CUBANS HAD DONE IN THE EDUCATIONAL AND PUBLIC

HEALTH FIELDS, HE SAID, WAS TRULY IMPRESSIVE BUT A TOUR THROUGH THE COUNTRYSIDE UNDERMINED THIS BELIEF THAT CASTRO

HAD MANAGED TO TRANSFORM RURAL CUBA COMPLETELY. IN HIS
OPINION, TEN TO FIFTEEN PERCENT OF RURAL CUBA HAD BEEN
MODERNIZED AND THE REMAINDER WAS MUCH AS IT HAD ALWAYS BEEN
AS REGARDS SOCIAL SERVICES, INFRASTRUCTURE ETC.

8. COMMENT: WHILE ECHEVERRIA REPEATED HIS OFT GIVEN COUNCIL
THAT CUBA MUST BE DETACHED FROM COMPLETE DEPENDENCY ON
THE USSR AND THE US SHOULD BEGIN ITS DIALOGUE, IT WAS INTERESTING
TO NOTE HOW MUCH MORE SUBDUED HE WAS IN REGARD TO
THE REALITIES OF THE CUBAN EXPERIENCE THAN HE HAD EXPECTED.
I GATHER THAT MRS. ECHEVERRIA'S STANCE MIGHT BE SOMEWHAT
DIFFERENT.
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